

Wang Huning, “Cultural Expansion and Cultural Sovereignty”

Wang Huning, “Cultural Expansion and Cultural Sovereignty: A Challenge to the Concept of Sovereignty”[1]

Introduction by Matthew D. Johnson

Introduction

Wang Huning (b. 1955) is widely viewed as China’s most powerful intellectual. He has directly served the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee under three successive leaders: Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping. He is currently the fifth-ranked member of the Party’s seven-man Politburo Standing Committee and directs the Central Secretariat, effectively making him Xi Jinping’s deputy in managing day-to-day Party affairs.

Although Wang’s role is succinctly described outside of China as that of an “ideologue,” in reality he also serves on a range of central Party commissions that drive policymaking in areas such as political-legal affairs, cybersecurity, finance, Party-building, official appointments, and military-civil fusion. Given his depth of experience and proximity to Xi, it is possible that Wang will rise even higher within the Party hierarchy when the 20th Party Congress meets in October 2022.

Wang Huning’s influence within the Party is attributable to his insights into how to secure socialism against the forces of Western globalization. Early on in his academic career at Fudan University, Wang diagnosed weaknesses in China’s system as the chief threat to socialism’s continued survival. These included the lack of a more inclusive “political technology” of Party-state organization suited to China’s national conditions; the lack of a unified political culture; and vulnerability to Western cultural hegemony imported through foreign trade and other forms of soft international power.

Wang produced much of his most important writing between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s – a period when China’s political economy and foreign relations were all being transformed by deeper integration with the world economy. Within this process of “reform and opening,” no country loomed larger than the United States, which Wang visited in 1988.

His record of that journey, *America Against America* (Shanghai Arts Press, 1991), was published in the aftermath of the Tiananmen massacre and political crackdown of 1989, both praised and criticized American society, and established Wang's reputation as a trenchant analyst of democracies. Notably, Wang's impression of the U.S. was of a country in crisis, which he attributed to irreconcilable tensions between forces of unity and individualism. Writing at the height of economic competition between the U.S. and Japan, he seemed to predict that Japan's "collectivism" (集体主义) provided a model for it and other countries to challenge the global position of the U.S. for decades to come.

Variations on the twin themes of global counter-hegemonism and domestic statism appear in every major Party theory from the Mao Zedong era to the present. Nonetheless, Wang Huning's intellectually rigorous appraisals offered a persuasive framework for reconstructing post-Mao politics because they directly contradicted the inevitability of liberal democracy, using examples drawn directly from the post-Cold War economic successes of countries other than the United States. In other words, they credibly and convincingly told China's leaders what they wanted to hear.

As one of China's leading "neo-authoritarian" establishment intellectuals during the late 1980s, Wang constructed a China-specific version of modernization theory inspired by American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, which he used as a lens for diagnosing internal Party organizational issues such as corruption, center-local institutional relations, and the preservation of political order amidst economic development.[2]

The sweep of his expertise, coupled with an interpretive arc that bent toward legitimization of highly centralized socialism as a political system, attracted the attention of Party leaders Wu Bangguo 吴邦国 (b. 1941) and Jiang Zemin, who are credited with having ordered his transfer to the Party's internal policy think tank – the Central Policy Research Office (CPRO). Wang became the CPRO's director in 2002, a position he held until relinquishing it to his protégé Jiang Jinqian 江金权 (b. 1959) in 2020. During this time he joined the Party Secretariat in 2002; the Politburo in 2007; and Politburo Standing Committee in 2017.

Proximity to the halls of power in Zhongnanhai have made the post-1990s evolution of Wang Huning's thinking more difficult to reconstruct. A likely hypothesis is that his Huntington-esque structural-functionalism has become indistinguishable from the dominant ideology of the Party itself. Wang is widely credited with having contributed to the major theories of each of the Party leaders he has served: Jiang Zemin's "Three Represents," Hu Jintao's "New Development

Concept,” and Xi Jinping’s “China Dream of the Great Revival of the Chinese Nation and “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.”

He was also, at least during its early phase, identified as an influence on the Belt and Road Initiative.[3] The common denominator of all of these theories – and, as noted by numerous observers, behind much of Wang’s work[4] – is the shared vision of a China in which the Party rules indefinitely, and of a world in which China is a more influential power.

This means that Wang has also become widely equated with China’s more combative strategic turn under Xi – a view that is undeniably credible given Wang’s history of rejection of Western globalization and all that it portends for China’s future if left unchecked. Yet a key piece of his thinking that is downplayed in profiles of Wang as a hardline, if ideologically tinged, power politician is his view of culture – expressed as “tradition,” “values,” or “civilization” – as an independent factor in determining political outcomes.

As an intellectual, Wang is therefore one in a long line of thinkers who have identified modernization as a process in permanent tension with the shared belief systems that bind human communities together. Viewed from the perspective of political order, modernization is desirable only insofar it can be counterbalanced with the creation of new value systems whose functional role is to keep institutions strong and societies governable. Strong states are culturally unified states. For an establishment intellectual in the context of CCP-ruled China, this means preserving and centralizing Party authority; renovating and expanding faith in Party socialism; and recalibrating globalization to make the international system more conducive to Party survival.

Wang is an “ideologue” in the sense that his views emphasize the importance of homogenizing values to conform to the Party Center’s strategic interests regardless of domain – in other words, his role as an official is not confined solely to propaganda or ideological education. At the same time, it is clearly no accident that Wang’s rise through the political ranks has coincided with an increasingly urgent emphasis on political belief and unity of purpose within the Party (e.g. the “Remember the Mission” campaign and political rectification of the Party’s internal security apparatus); orchestrated veneration of Xi Jinping and Xi Jinping Thought; and the enforced cultural cleansing carried out among religious communities and along China’s ethnic frontiers.

For all of these reasons, Wang’s role in China’s history may end up being that of another would-be “engineer of the soul,”[5] who for both political and nationalistic reasons envisions the salvation of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics as attainable only through the unceasing

transformation of those who live within and beneath it.

The text translated here, “Cultural Expansion and Cultural Sovereignty: A Challenge to the Concept of Sovereignty” (1994) is Wang's clearest statement on how to manage culture in the international context of globalization. Few questions were more important in Beijing at the time Wang's article was written and published. As “reform and opening” gained momentum under Deng, Party concerns about ideological infiltration from abroad intensified. Protests in China and the unravelling of socialism in Europe, culminating in the USSR's sudden disintegration, exacerbated these existential worries. Amidst swirling political and economic change, imported forces of “Westernization” and “division” further threatened the CCP's authority.[6]

The problem Wang begins with is a simple one: how to protect national sovereignty in an era of post-Soviet globalization:

“The end of the Cold War brought a series of striking changes to the world of international relations, and to the surprise of those who had been looking forward to the end of this war, it turned out that we said goodbye to one complex world only to enter another.”

In this new world, he argues, culture conflict has superseded political and military conflicts as the greatest challenge to sovereignty. Here Wang is playing the role of observer rather than explainer. Surveying the post-Cold War landscape, he concludes that “hard power” competition has been reduced while “soft power” competition has taken its place. Part of this newer contest is “counter-hegemonic” – the struggle of non-Western states against Western strategies of “cultural hegemony.” Part is a reassertion of nationalism between, and even within, countries. While both pose challenges to sovereignty, the former is Wang's primary concern. This is because, in the post-Cold War era, “Western countries are increasingly employing their cultural strength to constrain or influence world affairs and the process of internal developments of developing countries.” In other words, China's internal order is threatened by the expansion of Western political values.

The reaction to cultural expansionism is what Wang terms “cultural sovereignty” (which he also calls “cultural conservatism”). Here what Wang is attempting to explain is the resurgence of reinvented primordial national politics in Europe, particularly the states of the former Soviet Union, where the disintegration of Soviet republics has allowed other forms of nationalism to emerge. Often, as in the case of former Yugoslavia, the result is conflict. But cultural sovereignty also has a more positive aspect, as a reawakening of opposition to Western dominance:

“In the context of Eastern and Western cultures, Chinese culture in and of itself possesses a cultural existence with a long history, broad diffusion, and overall integration, which naturally poses a latent challenge to Western culture. There are those in the West who have understood this, and who are anxious to use Western cultural values to establish norms for a currently rising China. Western countries use the same strategy with other developing countries the world over. This is the challenge to the meaning of sovereignty: cultural sovereignty versus cultural hegemony.”

Here cultural sovereignty is a form of state power which must be nurtured and developed. Quoting Deng, Wang writes: “When certain Western countries talk about human rights or about the illegitimacy of the socialist system, they are in fact simply wielding cudgels with which they hope to damage our state power.” Struggle over culture is therefore a form of “political struggle,” and a necessary means of defending China’s political system.

Like Wang Huning’s earlier writing on the Cultural Revolution and structure of China’s political culture, this article winds its way toward the familiar conclusion that the most effective system to any problem – in this case, the problem of culture sovereignty – is for the Party-state to take charge so that “modernization” can proceed. But even as he recommends that China become more independent, and ultimately more powerful, in the cultural domain, he is snared by the same dilemma that faced Deng and other Party elders in managing China’s opening:

“Cultural sovereignty cannot become an excuse for cultural isolation, because cultural sovereignty ultimately aims for cultural openness and benefits the development of the people of the world as well as the cultural development of certain countries and peoples. The experience of biology and of human history have both illustrated that any closed system inevitably becomes archaic and obsolete, which means that at the present moment, all cultures must become open systems—open to the shared use of other cultures and other systems of knowledge, as well as the shared use of measures to meet the challenges and problems of the age of technology.”

The admission that political integration must have limits for the sake of preserving social dynamism is another hallmark of Wang’s thinking – one that is often overlooked in portrayals of him as a hardline neo-authoritarian. However, here he also makes another familiar move, which is to argue away more expansive definitions of democracy, political participation, and cultural sovereignty in favor of superseding collective interests: “Cultural diversity is a richness, but it is impossible to build a political system based on cultural diversity, which might pose even greater challenges to politics.” From the perspective of China’s domestic politics, the “sensitivity” of

cultural issues lies in their implications for ethnic self-determination.

Culture, Wang concludes, is therefore ultimately a matter of security. This view is reflected in the policies of Party leaders from Jiang Zemin onward, who have increasingly treated a range of issues framed as “cultural” – ethnicity, religion, national image, media, cultural industries, and information and data flows – as matters of political security and national interest.[7] Security, in turn, ultimately refers back to safeguarding the Party’s role as steward of China’s autonomy, growth, and process of self-transformation into a more globally powerful civilization. The part of this article which deals with political scientists Samuel Huntington, Joseph Nye, Francis Fukuyama, and James Rosenau reads almost like the revelation of a conspiracy – “soft power” not as a theory of power, but as a window onto the American strategy to subdue China with Western liberal ideology.

This is American political science read through the lens of Deng Xiaoping, who attributed China’s 1989 prodemocracy protests to the United States’ waging a smokeless world war” against the CCP.[8] Under the rules of this new form of conflict, real sovereignty and security can only be obtained if the international order itself is transformed so that contradiction between political systems no longer exists: “If a country can establish international norms that conform to those of its domestic society, then that country will have no need to change.” The deeper meaning of this statement is that “soft power” is not, according to Wang, a form of positive image projection or even external public opinion “management,” but a longer-term project to rework the dominant values and institutions of the international system itself.

Translation by David Ownby

The end of the Cold War brought a series of striking changes to the world of international relations, and to the surprise of those who had been looking forward to the end of this war, it turned out that we said goodbye to one complex world only to enter another. In this new world, marked by constant political disputes, military challenges, and economic conflicts, a new development is coming to everyone’s attention—the role of culture in international relations and international politics.

We might say that in the period immediately following the end of the Cold War, while the likelihood of political and military conflicts declined, the possibility of cultural conflict increased. Indeed, such conflicts were not only possible, but in many places become part of reality, a new focus of international relations, even producing bloody localized conflicts and political antagonisms. The point of this essay is to explore the political position of culture in today’s international relations, as well as the challenge that cultural development in and of itself

poses to the idea of sovereignty.

One

Cultural factors have been traditionally understood as variables in international relations, but the importance accorded to such variables has varied over time. The usual logic is that, when economic and military factors dominate, the role accorded to culture diminishes. The opposite is also true, so that a decline in the importance of political and military factors creates the possibility that culture will play a more important role in international relations.

This is not to say that cultural factors did not exist in the past, or that their role was unclear, but rather that “hard power” in the form politics or military might suppressed the role that culture played in international relations, meaning that culture is a kind of “soft power.” But once this high-handed political or military pressure is reduced, cultural conflicts or contradictions will appear, perhaps even in an expanded form. This is also a kind of push-back against the politics of hegemony by the objective forces of international relations. Thus in the post-Cold War period, cultural factors are increasingly important.

In the operation of international relations in the post-Cold War period, cultural factors have become an increasingly sensitive topic. People pay close attention to culture, and cultural factors can also lead to profound changes in international relations. For example, the extreme nationalist statements published by Vladimir Zhirinovsky (b. 1946) of the Russian Liberal Democratic Party provoked a fear of chauvinism, and as a result, countries like Germany, France, Romania, and Bulgaria, refused him permission enter their countries, and many countries expressed concern about his remarks.

From the perspective of state-to-state relations, the recent conflict between Greece and Macedonia was directly inspired by cultural factors. On February 18 of this year, Greece decided to close its consulate in the Macedonian capital of Skopje, at the same time cutting Macedonia’s economic lifeline by prohibiting Macedonia from using the Thessaloniki harbor to import goods. The reason is that, ever since Macedonia proclaimed its independence in 1991, Greece has consistently opposed its use of the name “Macedonia” for the country, because of its significance in the context of Greek culture and history. In addition, Greece has demanded that Macedonia remove the Macedonian insignia from its national flag: the Vergina Sun, which the Greeks see as part of their culture. The reason is that Macedonia might use such symbols to divide Greece, or even to expand its territory. This kind of cultural sensitivity is expressed in

many ways and in many places.

One of the most important ways this new trend is expressed is in developments in international cultural strategy, or, to put it another way, in a tendency toward cultural expansionism. This is expressed in two ways:

One is a strategy of “cultural hegemony.” In the post-Cold War era, Western countries are increasingly employing their cultural strength to constrain or influence world affairs and the process of internal developments of developing countries. For example, the idea of human rights has become an important cultural factor through which Western countries influence the internal political processes of other countries. In cultural systems with different ideas about human rights, the issue will gradually take on political dimensions and become a part of politics.

In reality, Western countries often use political and other means to promote their own values. In addition, in terms of political ideology, Western countries have increased their promotion of Western political values, as we see in their expectations for Russian political changes, or their interference in politics in Haiti. Formal diplomatic strategy in America also takes Western political values as a determining factor.

For example, the National Security Report produced during the first Bush administration regarded the expansion of the political values of the United States as one of the most basic tasks of national security, and Clinton made democracy one of the pillars of his diplomatic policy. For a long time, Western countries have sought to change the world through promoting Western values and ideas, and Marx early on offered a penetrating analysis of this process: “England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying the material foundations of Western society in Asia.”[9] The difference is that, while in the past they could use violence and political control to achieve their goals, this is no longer possible, so cultural expansionism has taken on a more purely cultural form.

The Dutch scholar Cees Hamelink’s (b. 1940) concept of “cultural synchronization” is in fact one form of “cultural imperialism.” His argument is that the progress of “cultural synchronization” means that the development of the culture of a suzerain country is in intimate communication with the culture of a receptor country, which causes local processes of social and cultural creativity to enter a state of decline or destruction, resulting in the rapid disappearance of local human values handed down over centuries. Paul W. Schroder[10] (1927-2020), the

American historian of international relations, more or less upholds the “cultural imperialism” concept, arguing that this idea means that there is a single market in the world system, that all societies are evaluated by the core areas of this market, and that world culture will develop in the direction determined by this market. This form of cultural expansionism might be called “cultural hegemony.”

Another expression of cultural expansionism is not this kind of vertical “cultural imperialism,” i.e., the attempt to impose your culture on others, but rather a horizontal cultural expansionism, which is an attempt to expand the scope of a culture, even into the territories of other countries, or to use culture to unify people who share a culture but who live in separate countries. This kind of cultural expansionism already exists, and in some cases is extremely virulent, as in the cases of “Pan-Slavism” or ideas concerning the possibility of a “Greater Turkestan.” Although in terms of form, this type of cultural expansionism does not seem to be as political as that discussed above, it nonetheless constitutes a serious challenge to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of certain countries.

If there is cultural expansionism, then there will be cultural conservatism. The positive expression of cultural conservatism is “cultural sovereignty.” In today’s international society, cultural sovereignty takes two principle forms. One is comprehensive, where a regime that possesses political sovereignty takes care to protect and enhance its cultural sovereignty. This tendency is principally found in developing countries which have encountered cultural pressure from developed countries in the post-Cold War period, particularly in terms of political ideology, lifestyle, and values. Such trends create more direct links between culture and sovereignty, and when developing countries protect their own culture they are also protecting their own sovereignty. At the same time, similar things are beginning to happen between developed countries.

The second trend in cultural sovereignty is that, in the new international context, even what were once seen as second-tier regimes are beginning to demand cultural sovereignty. James Mayall (b. 1937), in his *Nationalism and International Society*, points out that “cultural authenticity” is a rallying cry to many third world nationalists, just as was romanticism inspired much of Europe in the 19th century. With the disintegration of the post-WWII order, certain countries established after the war have experienced fragmentation, which has come to constitute the basic fact of their political situation. For example, the former Soviet Union separated into several countries, Czechoslovakia divided into two, the former Yugoslavia dissolved into several countries, which provoked a long a bloody war, and this tendency to demand cultural sovereignty is developing in other places. Extremist organizations among South African whites, for example, are demanding the establishment of their own “homeland.” A new trend in today’s international relations is thus

for demands for cultural sovereignty to grow into demands for political sovereignty.

Some formerly second-tier regimes are currently demanding to cast off what to this point have been their dependent ties on sovereign powers and become independent regimes with their own sovereignty, and the basis for this demand is cultural uniqueness. Following the end of the Cold War, a new tide of nationalism has swept the world. Nationalism takes many forms, such as political nationalism, economic nationalism, or historical nationalism. During the Cold War era, the most important of these was political nationalism, and in North-South relations, the most important is economic nationalism. With the end of the Cold War, historical nationalism and cultural nationalism have become increasingly pronounced. This is also the result of the overall change in the context of international politics. Nationalism is established on the basis of historical factors such as common language, commonly occupied territory, common mindsets, common customs, etc., of which culture is the most important. One might say that with the exception of territory, all of the other elements have a cultural nature.

Consequently, it is a frequent occurrence in international relations for a nation to demand greater independence for reasons of culture. At present, certain nationalistic movements are employing this kind of logic, as in the conflict between the Serbs, Croats, and Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the separation of the three Baltic states from the former Soviet Union, and the disintegration of other former Soviet republics, etc. From this we see the emergence of a demand for cultural sovereignty in international relations, and to demand political sovereignty on the basis of these cultural factors, a process that has greatly complicated and muddled contemporary international relations.

Two

People have offered different explanations of the changing role of culture in international relations. The most famous explanation is that of the “clash of civilizations.” Samuel T. Huntington (1927-2008), the well-known Harvard professor, published an article entitled “The Clash of Civilizations” in the 1993 summer edition of *Foreign Affairs*, the famous American journal of international strategy, in which he offered an argument that provoked considerable controversy: With the end of the Cold War, the period of Western dominance of international politics would come to an end, and the center of international relations would shift to the play of mutual influence between Western civilizations and non-Western civilizations, or that between non-Western civilizations themselves.

In the new world context, the possibility that conflict would occur would be decided not by ideological factors or economic factors, but rather by cultural differences, and a “clash of civilizations” would come to dominate the entire planet. The world would no longer be divided according to differences in political or economic systems, but would instead be based on culture and civilization. Seven or eight great civilizations would decide the future of the world, including Western civilization, Confucian civilization, Japanese civilization, Islamic civilization, Indian civilization, Slavic/Orthodox civilization, Latin American civilization, and African civilization. Major conflicts in the world would erupt around the cultural boundaries between these different civilizations. Should there be another war, it would be a conflict between civilizations.

The cultural boundaries distinguishing different civilizations would become future battle lines. Huntington’s basic argument is: a civilization is the basic vehicle of a culture, the highest cultural organization of a nation; civilizations are different because of differences in history, language, culture, and tradition, and even more because of differences in religion. Civilizations decide different people’s views of gods and people, self and group, father and son, husband and wife, as well as views of rights and responsibilities, freedoms, authority, and equality. These views do not disappear. Rather, the struggles of peoples and nations over culture and civilization are inevitable, so an international strategy with cultural and civilizational dimensions is required for survival in the post-Cold War international community.

The theory of “soft power” is also a response to the increasing role of culture in international relations. Soft power should be understood in opposition to “hard power.” Hard power refers to a particular country’s military might, natural resources, and other material strengths. In the modern era, hard power has been the most important organized component of a country’s strength. Factors such as military might, natural resources, national territory, and population have always been the gauges by which to measure a country’s true power.

Conflicts and contests in international relations in recent times generally have revolved around hard power. Joseph Nye (b. 1937), the well known American theorist of international relations, has noted that soft power is becoming increasingly important in contemporary international relations. His argument is that: the Cold War is over, which means that now we need to think seriously about a new strategy. This theory leads people to seek cultural hegemony so as to consolidate their own country’s position and protect their own country’s interests.

Cultural hegemony exists not only as a subjective strategic choice, but also as an objectively evolving process. Cultural power is not produced by culture alone, but also draws on the power of such factors as history, politics, and economics. In Western countries’ long process of

development, they established their economic superiority over the world, which spread the system and scope of the Western economy throughout the world. They accumulated an initial superiority in terms of economics, technology, science, capital, and scale, etc. The cultural values of Western countries have relied on this advantage to penetrate and spread around the world, advancing the interests of Western diplomacy. By contrast, the inferiority of developing countries in terms of politics, economics, and science and technology creates a kind of dependency, and their cultural values do not play the same role. These countries instead find themselves faced with a huge challenge.

At present, certain Western strategists of international relations advocate making greater use of the relative superiority of Western cultural values to set the norms for the new international context of the post-Cold War era. To a certain degree, “cultural hegemony” is a natural outcome of this type of strategy. In a certain sense, the roots of cultural hegemony can be found in the enduring notion of “Eurocentrism.” A recent concentrated expression of this is Francis Fukuyama’s (b. 1952) *The End of History and the Last Man*, a book that has prompted a great deal of discussion. Fukuyama’s core argument is: Western liberal ideology has already defeated all other ideologies, and Western liberal institutions may well become “the end point of progress of mankind throughout the world,” and “the ultimate form of political rule throughout the world,” which means precisely the “end of history,” because history will no longer evolve in new directions.

The basic logic of *The End of History and the Last Man* is as follows:

1. The striking recent changes in international relations reveal the existence of a “universal history.” If at present people cannot imagine a world fundamentally different from their own, or cannot envision a clear future resulting from a change in the present social order, this means that the history of humanity has reached its end point.
2. The modern development of science and technology has had a huge impact on society and history, leading to the gradual convergence of all societies, as well as to the universal possibility of economic growth and the satisfaction of people’s material needs. Consequently, all societies are gradually trending toward “homogeneity,” and all countries that are pursuing economic modernization are becoming increasingly similar, in that they all have centralized governments, pursue national unity, promote urbanization, construct legitimate economic systems, promote public education, and become societies of mass consumption.

3. The ultimate force in historical development is what Hegel called “the struggle for recognition.” In the history of the development of Western society, “recognized desires” have played a pivotal role; people demand that their own values be recognized, and this is a force that propels history forward. Social development leads people to pursue their own values, above and beyond their pursuit for material wealth. This is the link between economic and political development. We should use this kind of “propulsive force” to reinterpret things like culture, religion, work, nationalism, and war.

4. Many things in contemporary and future society should be understood through the conceptual lens of “the struggle for recognition:” religious fervor is the struggle to achieve recognition for a people’s own gods; nationalism is the struggle to achieve recognition for a people’s own language and culture; labor is the activity by which people struggle for recognition in today’s society; and the essence of international politics can also be explained through “the struggle for recognition.”

5. The concept of the “last man” comes from Nietzsche, who argued that the development of capitalism reduced man to his material interests. People had lost their values as well as their thinking brains, and pursued their selfish desires without a thought for more exalted goals. The “last man” abandoned the idea of becoming human. Fukuyama, however, defends this “last man,” arguing that people are unable to return to the condition of the “first man,” meaning original or primitive man, but should rather live in a state of equality with other people in this world. An effective means to prevent the return to the “first man” is to develop science and technology, and fully satisfy people’s desires.

Fukuyama’s argument clearly states that the development of the history of humanity can only be explained through the lens of Western history, meaning that the histories of other regions can be discounted, because Western ideology has already become the end point of the development of history. This kind of reasoning is the essence of cultural hegemony. Of course, Fukuyama did not directly propose adopting a strategy of “cultural hegemony,” but his argument lays the ideological foundation for cultural hegemony or proving its historical legitimacy. This argument was clearly destined for criticism from many parties.

The process of development of economics, politics, culture, and science and technology throughout the world will naturally produce a certain amount of cultural and social integration. In his *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity*, James Rosenau introduces the concept of “global culture,” and argues that the development of global interdependency expands the cultural foundation of world politics, and strengthens cooperation in international relations between sovereign and non-sovereign subjects. Deepening

interdependency leads to the sharing of norms, and to the absorption of local communities by the global community.

There are many different cultural systems in today's world, which allows people to explain world events in different ways, yet the development of science and technology, as well as interdependent economic relations, are currently creating "global culture." In the context of an ideal international society, an important foundation would be that everyone share a common value system, which is the only way to build a truly international regime. The issue here is the use of a value system to function as the basic system of a "global culture," because without these values the system cannot function. If this culture evolves according to its own laws, then it should be welcomed, because the integration of any set of values will ultimately facilitate the equitable development of humanity's common interests.

At a moment when people are arguing over conflicts and peace in today's world and in the future, when people are troubled by problems like nuclear weapons, environmental pollution, arms control, and economic development, it would of course be helpful if the development of world culture and civilization could resolve these problems by building a set of shared values. However, if such a strategy is deliberately pursued for the interests of a single party as part of political machinations, or if it is a question of imposing one party's values and culture on other peoples, then not only will this not lead to positive developments in the world order and international relations, but will instead produce even more negative results.

Three

The debate over cultural sovereignty or cultural hegemony is basically a reflection of the question of national sovereignty in the context of contemporary international relations, a new point of contention in the struggle for sovereignty. For most of the 20th century, mankind's struggle for sovereignty centered on political independence, but after the end of WWII, with the progress of anti-colonialism, the question of sovereignty gradually moved to the realm of economic sovereignty, a trend that was particularly clear in the 1970s and 1980s.

As the United Nations pointed out in its Declaration of a New International Order passed in 1974: we must work to establish new international economic order that transcends economic and social systems and is based on equity, sovereign equality, common interests, and cooperation among all countries, an order that will correct inequalities and existing injustices and eliminate the growing gap between developed and developing countries, ensure a stable economic and

social development, as well as peace and justice for this and future generations.

One might say that this is a formal expression of the struggles over sovereignty in the 1970s, as those struggles moved away from the economic realm and toward questions of sovereignty. Can we say that today, the struggle for sovereignty has entered another era, centered on cultural sovereignty? It is too early for a definitive conclusion, but certain signs are already very clear, and we need to pay close attention.

The struggle for cultural sovereignty is not as intense as struggles for political or economic sovereignty, but no struggle over sovereignty can be completely divorced from politics, and under certain conditions, this struggle over cultural sovereignty will develop into an open struggle for political sovereignty. As a result, one cannot interpret conflicts over cultural sovereignty or cultural hegemony solely from a cultural perspective. Behind these struggles are reflections of struggles for political sovereignty, or of competition over national interests on the international stage, or of trends and structures of differing interests in the realm of international relations.

Cultural conflicts in international relations also lead people to think about an even deeper question: the function of national sovereignty in the context of contemporary international relations. The basic question is still: is national sovereignty obsolete? Should there be limits to it? In the 20th century West, the concept of sovereignty found itself in a perilous position, essentially because Western countries have already completed their basic political development, and the next challenge is to expand throughout the world, to send capital out to the four corners of the planet. In such a context, sovereignty obviously becomes an obstacle. In addition, the two world wars in Europe made people suspicious of the consequences of states' having absolute sovereignty, because in the absence of limits, countries can launch wars.

After WWI, people already launched any number of challenges to the idea of sovereignty, believing that the concept was one of the main reasons that had led to the war. Among those against sovereignty at the time were Robert Lansing (1864-1928) (Notes on World Sovereignty), Hyman Ezra Cohen (1908-1969) (Recent Theories of Sovereignty), Sterling Edmunds (1880-1944) (The Lawless Law of Nations), and Nicolas Politis (1872-1942) (New Trends in International Law), among others.[11] A large majority of political theorists and scholars of international relations leaned toward admitting limitations on sovereignty, in other words, that sovereignty would be constrained by international law.

After WWII, suspicions of the notion of sovereignty increased. Zhou Gengsheng 周鯁生 (1889-1971), a Chinese scholar of international law, noted that: “After the end of WWII...sovereignty became a target of public criticism; dismissing national sovereignty became a leading stream of thought among those arguing for the expansion of international law or of internationalists.” The fact that the West experienced two great wars in the first half of the 20th century inevitably led people to look for an alternative to basic concepts of national sovereignty, and at the time there were a fair number of people in favor of limiting or eliminating sovereignty, such as the English philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), who argued for the establishment of a world government and the abolition of national sovereignty.

Linus Pauling (1901-1994), in his *No More War!* Suggested eliminating war through signing international agreements. Howard Coster’s [科斯特] judgement was: “The obsolete sovereign state has shown its true form—nothing more than a residual lump in the world's circulatory system that prevents the flow of blood.” Ernest Bevin (1881-1951) believed: “History is currently leading the term ‘state sovereignty’ to lose its meaning.”

Recent developments in international relations theory also show a clear tendency to weaken state sovereignty, as in the meaning of collective security in the slogans of the “New International Order” and the idea of amplifying the role of the United Nations, the basic notion of which is that states do not possess absolute sovereignty. James Rosenau (1924-2011) has discussed the “erosion of sovereignty” in contemporary international relations, arguing that in his view, interdependency and the development of a world system have produced an “erosion of sovereignty,” in which different countries increasingly discuss the internal affairs of other countries, and international society and international organizations increasingly interfere in those same internal affairs, as when the United States intervened in the Philippine president Fernando Marcos’s removal from office, in American military interference in the regime of Panamanian General Noriega, or in American intervention in narcotics traffic in Columbia, Ecuador, and Peru.

People’s different understandings about sovereignty in fact have less to do with people’s subjective judgements, and more to do with objective world developments. Current world developments, particularly in terms of internationalization or integration, are a challenge to traditional ideas of sovereignty. However, for developing countries, and especially under conditions of unequal economic development, in which developed countries intervene and interfere economically and politically in the internal affairs of developing countries, the idea of sovereignty remains extremely important to developing countries.

Developing countries are currently in a weak position in terms of soft power. However, once their political, economic, scientific, and technological strength increases, the strength of their cultural values will also increase. The strategic objectives of those Western countries that are currently attempting to establish cultural hegemony are also thinking of their own long term interests. For example, once the Chinese economy has greatly developed, and especially once we see what China's economic momentum portends for the future, this may give rise to a certain movement in public opinion having to do with the "China threat."

In fact, this not only has to do with an analysis of China's eventual hard power, but also expresses anxiety about the strength of China's cultural values. In the context of Eastern and Western cultures, Chinese culture in and of itself possesses a cultural existence with a long history, broad diffusion, and overall integration, which naturally poses a latent challenge to Western culture. There are those in the West who have understood this, and who are anxious to use Western cultural values to establish norms for a currently rising China. Western countries use the same strategy with other developing countries the world over. This is the challenge to the meaning of sovereignty: cultural sovereignty versus cultural hegemony.

China is a developing country, and in terms of comprehensive national strength, while it is developing rapidly, in international terms China still lags behind. For this reason, in the process of China's development and participation in international society, China must protect her own position and take charge of her own orientation. Comparing national power at the international level, China's key strategy is currently to maintain its independence and autonomy, and in the absence of a foreign policy reflecting such a strategy, China cannot stand tall among the nations of the world, cannot survive fierce international competition, and cannot efficiently realize her strategic goal of modernization.

Hence, Deng Xiaoping pointed out: "We must always give pride of place to state sovereignty and state security; we are clearer on this than in the past." Or, as he put it descriptively, "we cannot ride in other people's cars." "China's foreign policy is independence and autonomy, the true avoidance of alliances. China does not play the America card, nor does it play the Soviet Union card, and China does not let other people play the China card." The reason why we especially emphasize the protection of state sovereignty is first because of the needs of China's development and modernization, and second because of our overall evaluation of the international context.

When discussing national sovereignty, Deng Xiaoping mentioned the concept of "state power." "When certain Western countries talk about human rights or about the illegitimacy of the socialist system, they are in fact simply wielding cudgels with which they hope to damage out

state power.” “State power is much more important than human rights. Western countries often abuse the state power of weak countries or of third world countries.” One might say that this accurately depicts the cultural character of contemporary struggles over sovereignty. “Human rights” have become an excuse for certain countries to meddle in the internal politics of other countries, as well as being a values choice. But “state power” puts the emphasis squarely on sovereignty. The fact that human rights issues are a focal point in contemporary struggles in international relations is not merely an argument over concepts, but instead is a kind of political struggle, a struggle to protect a country’s independence and autonomy.

Protecting state power is the major challenge faced by developing countries in today’s world, and this is something that developed countries simply ignore. In the absence of state power, there is no point in talking about the political existence of a country, to say nothing of its development. This is a necessity for all developing countries. Although today’s struggles take the form of cultural and values-based conflicts, insightful politicians will not think about these questions solely from the perspective of culture and values.

Objectively speaking, it is not altogether true that there are no limits on sovereignty, because neither people nor countries can simply do as they please, yet if one country willfully (lit., subjectively, 主观上) imposes limits on the sovereignty of another country, then this is something else altogether. In today’s international society, sovereignty must be protected, even if we cannot say that it is absolute. In his article “Ten Factors Limiting Sovereignty,” Wang Yizhou 王逸舟(b. 1957, currently professor and Vice-Dean at Peking University’s School of International Studies) points out that, following changes in the international situation, traditional notions of sovereignty are now limited by ten factors:

1. The lack of overlap between ethnic group and national borders;
2. Weakness in the political capacity or sense of responsibility of governments;
3. The availability of resources and the quality of diplomacy;
4. Cultural identity and popular psychology;

5. Increased international intervention and the “hardening” of international law;
6. The multiplication of the functions of international organizations;
7. Increasing strength of the non-governmental sector;
8. The “borderless” nature of the economy, and the interdependency of countries;
9. The deepening of global crises;
10. Human space exploration and its challenges to international law.

Here we see both objective and subjective forces at play. Cultural sovereignty is also a relative concept, and if all social actors in possession of their own particular cultures were to demand political sovereignty on the basis of their “cultural sovereignty,” the map of the world would see drastic changes. According to estimates, there may be more than 5,000 peoples or ethnic groups in the world who would like to have their own country, and there are more than 260 non-sovereign and non-subject peoples who could establish a nation-state. Cultural diversity is a richness, but it is impossible to build a political system based on cultural diversity, which might pose even greater challenges to politics.

This means that cultural sovereignty has its limits as well:

1. It is impossible for all groups with cultural particularities to demand a cultural sovereignty that will lead to political sovereignty;
2. Cultural sovereignty cannot develop beyond national borders, and cultural sovereignty cannot be used to unite cultural agents who are already divided by national borders, and hence to change the rules of political sovereignty;

3. Cultural sovereignty cannot become an excuse for cultural isolation, because cultural sovereignty ultimately aims for cultural openness and benefits the development of the people of the world as well as the cultural development of certain countries and peoples. The experience of biology and of human history have both illustrated that any closed system inevitably becomes archaic and obsolete, which means that at the present moment, all cultures must become open systems—open to the shared use of other cultures and other systems of knowledge, as well as the shared use of measures to meet the challenges and problems of the age of technology.

From the perspective of cultural interests themselves, cultural sovereignty is also significant. Certain scholars argue that we are currently moving toward a single world culture, in which “colonization” is replaced by “Coca-colanization.” Obviously, this means a unified culture, which will at the same time be a poorer culture. Much of the diversity of the rich cultural traditions of Asia, Africa, and Europe will disappear. World culture should be plural, not single and monotonous. Given today’s trends toward global integration, how to maintain cultural pluralism is truly something we should pay attention to.

This problem does not only occur between developed and developing nations, but between developed nations as well, as witnessed by France’s recent decision to “protect the French language,” meaning essentially to ward off an American cultural invasion of the French language; European film and television moguls meet frequently to discuss blunting the Hollywood invasion, etc. But this question is a bit different from the one I am discussing here.

Cultural hegemony constitutes the new form of hegemonic politics and power politics in today’s international relations. Countries with economic, political, and military strength, chiefly Western countries, are using their cultural power to constrain the international conduct of other countries in the world, and even their domestic behavior, going so far on occasion as to attempt to influence the process of internal political policy making in other countries. This is a new international strategy. Especially in terms of developing countries still in the process of maturation, and who may in the future come to have actual power, Western countries are attempting to use their value standards to influence these countries, even through political, economic, and even military means.

No one should deploy cultural expansionism in the dynamic process of international relations, but every state and people can use cultural factors to the fullest in order to develop a rational strategy, a foreign policy in line with the present-day context of international relations, and thereby accumulate resources and soft power. Today’s world is a mutually interdependent

world, , which means that national security goals cannot be achieved solely through military means. The use of traditional methods of power by the great powers is no longer effective, and the deepening of the interdependency of international society, the increase in the number of cross-national groups, the nationalism of weak countries, the growth of technology and the transformation of political questions have all brought about changes in the nature of power.

The basic theory is: if a country can make its power appear reasonable in the eyes of another country, there will be less resistance in getting what it wants, and if a country's culture and ideology are attractive, others will automatically follow them. If a country can establish international norms that conform to those of its domestic society, then that country will have no need to change. If a country can sustain an international system, then all other countries will want to coordinate their activities within that system, which means that the country sustaining the international order will not have to make use of its expensive hard power.

Notes

[1] 王沪宁, “文化扩张与文化主权: 对主权观念的挑战,” 复旦学报 (社会科学版), 1994.3: 9—15.

[2] An excellent overview of neo-authoritarian views and their context is Jude Blanchette, “Wang Huning’s Neo-Authoritarian Dream,” October 20, 2017.

[3] Jane Perlez, “Behind the Scenes, Communist Strategist Presses China’s Rise,” The New York Times, November 13, 2017.

[4] See for example:

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323728204578513422637924256>;
<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/26/world/asia/xi-jinping-china-president-inner-circle-western-officials.html>; <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2116964/wang-huning-low-profile-liberal-dream-weaver-whos-about>; <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/08/09/handling-of-us-trade-dispute-causes-rift-in-chinese-leadership-source.html>;
<https://www.chinalawblog.com/2019/06/does-china-want-a-second-decoupling-the-chinese-texts-say-it-does.html>.

[5] See John Garnaut, “Engineers of the Soul: Ideology in Xi Jinping’s China,” Sinocism, January 16, 2019.

[6] “中共中央关于加强社会主义精神文明建设若干重要问题的决议,” October 1996, <https://web.archive.org/web/20030325221414/http://www.china.com.cn/ch-80years/lici/14/14-6/1.htm>

[7] See e.g. Matthew D. Johnson, “Safeguarding socialism: The origins, evolution and expansion of China’s total security paradigm”, Sinopsis, June 11, 2020, <https://sinopsis.cz/en/johnson-safeguarding-socialism/>

[8] See Cai Xia, “China-US Relations in the Eyes of the Chinese Communist Party: An Insider’s Perspective,” The Hoover Institution, CGSP Occasional Paper Series No. 1, June 2021, <https://www.hoover.org/research/china-us-relations-eyes-chinese-communist-party-insiders-perspective-zhong-gong-yan-zhong>

[9]Translator’s note: Translation taken from <https://marxists.architecturez.net/archive/marx/works/1853/07/22.htm> .

[10]Translator’s note: The scholar Wang cites is 施勒, who may or may not be Paul Schroder. The internet was not helpful in tracking him or her down.

[11]Translator’s note: In fact, Wang mentions several authors and works that I was unable to identify: 克拉勃 (Crabbe?) 现在国家观念 (1926), 巴德望, 和平法总则 (1936), [thanks to Anne Cheng for identifying this author as Jules Basdevant, and the book as Règles générales du droit de la paix] and a French author named 赛尔.